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Environment Secretary Ron Curry Approves Remedy for Mixed Waste Landfill at Sandia National Laboratories

(Santa Fe, NM) — New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) Secretary Ron Curry has approved a remedy to limit future health hazards and closely monitor the Mixed Waste Landfill (MWL) at Sandia National Laboratories (SNL or Sandia). Requirements include the installation of a vegetative cover and bio-intrusion barrier, the submission of a long-term monitoring and maintenance plan, and the development of a comprehensive fate and transport model including triggers for future actions. The remedy approved will be incorporated into SNL's Hazardous Waste Permit and its requirements will be enforced by NMED's Hazardous Waste Bureau.

"We feel that this remedy is the best, most responsible way to protect the health of workers today and the citizens of Albuquerque into the future," said Secretary Curry. "This decision takes Sandia's proposal for the landfill and tightens it several notches. This will include strong actions to limit current exposure to waste at the landfill and the flexibility to go further in the future if the situation warrants."

The MWL is 2.6 acres in size and is located at Technical Area (TA) 3, approximately five miles southeast of the Albuquerque International Sunport, within the boundaries of Kirtland Air Force Base (KAFB), south of Albuquerque.

The MWL was opened as the "TA-3 low-level radioactive waste dump" in March 1959 and operated until December 1988. As a result of these past activities, hazardous, radioactive, mixed (those wastes containing both hazardous and radioactive components), and solid wastes were disposed at the landfill. Records indicate that approximately 100,000 cubic feet of low-level radioactive waste containing 6,300 curies (Ci) of activity at the time of disposal were disposed of at the MWL.

In 2001 NMED directed Sandia to conduct a Corrective Measures Study (CMS) for the MWL because of concerns raised by the public. A CMS was conducted by Sandia to propose corrective measures or remedies for the MWL. NMED deemed the CMS complete on January 5, 2004. Sandia subsequently requested a modification to their Permit recommending

a corrective measure for the MWL. On December 2, 3, 8 and 9, 2004 NMED conducted a public hearing on this matter in Albuquerque. This decision is the final action in the permit modification process.

"The NMED approved remedy goes above and beyond Sandia's proposal in three key areas," said Secretary Curry. "It includes a bio-intrusion barrier to limit the ability of small animals to burrow into the landfill and spread waste, it requires Sandia to develop a comprehensive fate and transport model to set triggers and evaluate future actions, and it includes robust public comment and review requirements on all reports and plans related to the landfill."

Under the requirements incorporated into Sandia's permit, SNL now has 180 days to submit a Corrective Measures Implementation Plan to NMED that includes enforceable implementation schedules. Sandia must also submit for NMED approval a long-term monitoring and maintenance plan and a comprehensive fate and transport model for the landfill. Finally, Sandia must prepare a report every five years that revaluates the feasibility of excavations and analyzes the continued effectiveness of the remedy.

"It is clear that excavation of the landfill today could pose substantial health risks to excavation workers," said Secretary Curry. "But there may come a time in the future when excavation makes the most environmental sense. This remedy will keep us prepared to detect and respond appropriately to any changes and future threats at the landfill. The robust monitoring plan ensures that these alerts will come well before contaminants approach groundwater."

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